

Level III apprenticeship in Portugal – notes on a case study ⁽¹⁾

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SUMMARY

This article presents the results of research into how young trainees in the level III apprenticeship system formulate their educational and professional plans, what expectations they have of obtaining socially and professionally recognised qualifications, and in what way enterprises see such training as a strategy for providing human resources with qualifications.

The empirical research was carried out in two contexts (vocational training centre and enterprises) by means of two questionnaires, one addressed to the trainees involved and the other to the persons responsible for enterprises hosting on-the-job training.

The results obtained show that this type of training represents an opportunity for the Portuguese education system, which faces high levels of failure and persistently high numbers of premature school leavers. The pedagogical value of on-the-job training is underexploited, however, pointing towards a combination of employment and education and towards the promotion of activities more characteristic of Taylorism.

Keywords

Portugal, equal opportunities, vocational education, dual system, motivation, human resources

⁽¹⁾ This article is based on a Masters dissertation in *Educação e Sociedade* presented at the *Instituto Superior das Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa* (Lisbon).

Introduction

Since coordination between the education and training systems and the economic structure in Portugal is particularly important because it is an area in which there is a great deal of lost ground to be made up (low educational level of a large part of the adult working population and low secondary education enrolment and success), it has become necessary to consider ‘the stepping up of work-linked training strategies, combining school-based instruction with on-the-job training’ (Carneiro, 2000: 96). This idea was explicitly endorsed in the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council ⁽²⁾ on the promotion of European pathways in work-linked training.

In Portugal the various secondary education courses ⁽³⁾ fall into the following areas: i) science and humanities – organised and designed for the pursuit of higher education studies; ii) technology – organised from a dual perspective, the pursuit of higher education studies and post-secondary technological specialisation courses, and inclusion in the labour market, with emphasis on the new technologies; iii) specialised art education – designed to promote the development of the different forms of artistic expression in specially designed and equipped schools; iv) vocational education – focusing on skills development to ensure appropriate inclusion in the labour market; v) vocational training – giving concrete expression to the principle of a combination of employment and education and building a personal pathway, currently identified as ‘apprenticeship’.

⁽²⁾ 21 December 1998, on the promotion of European pathways in work-linked training.

⁽³⁾ For an overview of vocational education and training systems in Portugal, see:
http://portal.iefp.pt/portal/page?_pageid=177,160114&_dad=gov_portal_iefp&_schema=GOV_PORTAL_IEFP&id=2

Level III apprenticeship in Portugal

In countries in which academic models prevail, as in Portugal, training schemes such as apprenticeship represent alternatives for people who leave the education system prematurely and who are potentially at risk of unemployment or exclusion (Azevedo, 2001a; Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004). Vocational training provision can therefore lead to less recognised educational and vocational pathways, 'since the consolidation and sustained development of diversified, coordinated and high-quality secondary education and training capable of attracting a varied demand, without creating socially and educationally stigmatised pathways' (Azevedo, 2002: 48) has failed. In countries in which the dual system is well established, such as Germany, the social demand for this type of training is greater and more diversified (Heinz, 2000), and much less stigmatised.

In the second half of the 1990s, level III apprenticeship courses expanded very rapidly, rising from 7 028 trainees in 1994 to 17 534 in 2000. The range of reforms carried out ⁽⁴⁾ probably played a role in this, not only repositioning the scheme within the education/training system but also improving the quality of the training delivered, particularly its most characteristic dimension – on-the-job training. It also enjoyed favourable funding through Community Support Frameworks II and III, a strategic priority of which is human resources development and modernisation of production infrastructure. In this context the Employment, Training and Social Development operational programme states that the most significant obstacles facing young job seekers include lack of work experience and effective mechanisms to facilitate the transition from school to working life. According to the same programme, in order to bridge this gap, all training paths and the vocational training forming part of the education system and the labour market must be strengthened, focusing on work-linked training in particular.

The most recent statistics show that the population currently involved in this type of training covers approximately 6 % of secondary education pupils, as can be seen from Table 1.

Level III apprenticeship, currently the responsibility of the *Ministério do Trabalho e da Solidariedade Social* [Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity], is an alternative type of secondary education training which is essentially geared towards giving young people experience of real work situations and local and sectoral production environments.

⁽⁴⁾ Decree Law 205/96 of 25 October.

Table 1. Distribution of secondary education enrolments according to the different types

	General/ scientific humanistic	Tecnological	Art	Vocational	Recurrent	Education/ training courses	Level III apprentice- ship *
2003/2004	199 880	50 837	1 566	31 346	75 489	–	18 737
2004/2005	189 567	55 337	2 317	33 131	64 842	520	20 811

Source: Preliminary data – Gabinete de Informação e Avaliação do Sistema Educativo.

* These data relate to calendar years (2003 and 2004).

Source: *Sistema de Gestão da formação* – SGFOR via BO – Business Objects.

Taking the combining of employment and education as a training method, the main aim of apprenticeship is to combat failure and unemployment among young people while training skilled labour for the process of modernisation and innovation which the business community demands so much.

All apprenticeship courses ⁽⁵⁾ include three training components: socio-cultural, scientific-technological and practical. The first component involves areas seeking to provide transversal skills, both in terms of academic knowledge and in attitudes fostering personal and behavioural development, with a view to increasing employability and facilitating the ability to work and to perform different social roles in various contexts, particularly employment. The scientific-technological training component involves areas geared towards acquiring the knowledge necessary for specific techniques and information technologies, developing practical activities and providing experience in a training context, and resolving problems typical of the workplace. The practical training component, delivered in a work environment and overseen by a tutor, seeks to consolidate the skills and knowledge acquired in training ⁽⁶⁾ by performing typical workplace activities, and to facilitate young people's integration into the labour market. Practical training, however, must not exceed 50 % of total training time, and must include on-the-job training (30 %) and practical simulation (20 %).

⁽⁵⁾ See in this respect: http://portal.iefp.pt/portal/page?_pageid=117,104253&_dad=gov_portal_iefp&_schema=GOV_PORTAL_IEFP. [26.4.2007]

⁽⁶⁾ The aim is effective coordination of the training and work environments. Conditions must be created for developing the stakeholders involved, since certain reference points must be set out that relate to what should be learned in each training environment and to the coordination, over time and in training methods, between each component. It is more demanding in terms of the role of the enterprise, which will have to make itself aware of the coordination envisaged and foster situations that allow such training (Imaginário, 1999: 30; Pedroso, 1996: 272-273).

Both an educational equivalence qualification and a certificate of professional competence are awarded. Coordination within the general training system involves training provision that does not exclude involvement in future educational pathways, particularly admission to higher education. Conditions can accordingly be created that raise the value society attaches to vocational education for young people, thereby helping to produce the personnel with intermediate qualifications the country is in such need of (Azevedo, 2002). The various social stakeholders involved, however, will have to change their attitude if a view of education tending to confirm and consolidate inequalities between individuals and groups based on social representations of training courses and areas is to be superseded.

Natália Alves (1996) draws attention to the fact that although work-linked training is closely associated to the German dual system, rather than being an attribute of a single specific mechanism it is in fact transversal to various types of training. It is precisely this transversal nature that helps to ensure that work-linked training cannot be characterised either as a mechanism with its own identity or as a specific type of any education/training system. Its definitions ⁽⁷⁾ and teaching potential, however, mark out the field of reference in which it is situated.

The German dual system has various strong points, in particular as regards on-the-job training. While the training component functions in schools on a public basis, it functions in enterprises on a private basis and is heavily co-funded, leading enterprises to see it as investment-related. Neves (1993) highlights two strong points: i) by funding the training, enterprises tend to maximise returns by employing the young people they invest in; ii) by meeting the costs of training, enterprises necessarily consider themselves to be partners with an interest in its quality. The German dual system was therefore seen as a model to be emulated. Even though attempts were made to apply this reference point to other contexts, the German corporate investment conditions were difficult to obtain, which hindered the full reproduction of the model.

In the Portuguese case, despite the intentions set out in the *Lei da Aprendizagem* [Apprenticeship Act] ⁽⁸⁾, which advocated strong

⁽⁷⁾ The combining of employment and education has been referred to as a key concept in the context of vocational education and training. However, it embodies a significant range of ambiguities and a certain conceptual inaccuracy, often designating different reference points (Pedroso, 1996).

⁽⁸⁾ Decree-Law no 102/84 – creation of the apprenticeship system, seeking to launch a nationwide programme.

corporate involvement in this training programme, resistance and limitations arose in terms of investment that meant that the underlying philosophy had to be reversed to some extent: 'in Portugal, the feasibility of apprenticeship required (...) the public authorities to be very willing to promote the system, financially compensating enterprises for their costs (fall in productivity, materials used, working hours of monitors), the enterprises only contributing to the young people's training grant' (Neves, 1993: 55). In these circumstances the responsibility of the enterprises and their consequent involvement tended to decline, jeopardising the quality of the on-the-job training component. This means that training time in the enterprise is often pedagogically under-exploited, and that the degree of coordination between the two training reference points erodes. Pedroso (1996: 278) argues that the root of the problem lay in the type of relationship established between training context and work environment, the level of pedagogical consultation among training personnel, the combination of employment and education underlying the practice of the personnel involved, and the concrete experience of the trainees whose personal experience includes both dimensions. Acceptance of the low training potential of the work situation may correspond to undervaluing work-linked training and a relative lack of interest in it as a training scheme in Portugal (Neves e Pedroso, 1994: 33).

Recent statistics indicate that Portugal has a clear shortfall in intermediate and senior personnel compared to other European Union countries (Costa, 2000; Azevedo, 2002), and it is precisely in this context that the value of work-linked training is twofold: it helps to raise young people's qualifications and simultaneously develops skills and knowledge acquisition that promote the internalisation of a culture of participation and foster the freedom and development of trainees as individuals and citizens.

It is therefore important to find out how young trainees in the apprenticeship system (level III) map out their educational and vocational plans, what expectations they have of acquiring socially and vocationally recognised qualifications, and how enterprises consider such training as a human resources development strategy.

What is the social origin of these young people? What socio-educational resources do their parents have? What led them to opt for the apprenticeship system? What do they think of this type of training? What are their educational and vocational expectations? Do the skills that enterprises value coincide with the skills developed in the training programme? Does the social representation of this type of training have an influence on the way enterprises invest in and create

strategic links with it? These are some of the questions this study sought to address.

The research was carried out in a directly managed vocational training centre ⁽⁹⁾ that offered substantial training provision ⁽¹⁰⁾, both quantitatively and in terms of the diversification of level III training areas, and in a range of enterprises hosting the on-the-job training. It then focused on 279 trainees, distributed among 21 1st, 2nd and 3rd year cohorts, and 56 enterprises that hosted the training in a real work environment. Given the variety of stakeholders involved, it was decided to use questionnaires, one addressed to the trainees ⁽¹¹⁾ (social background, educational pathway, degree of satisfaction with the training course, expectations of upward social mobility) and the other to the persons responsible for the enterprises involved (size of enterprise, branch of activity, human resources, degree of satisfaction with the training courses, evaluation of the operation of the course, involvement in the training process and expectations of the trainees involved).

Trainees' thinking and expectations

Socio-demographic profiles

In Portugal, little research has been carried out on the young people who undergo this type of training. The need for greater awareness of the social basis of recruitment for this training provision meant that particular attention was paid to describing the socio-demographic profiles.

The young people involved are between 15 and 24 years of age, the majority being male (M= 68.8 %; F= 31.2 %). A significant discrepancy in the gender distribution on each course was also in evidence. As can be seen, the courses in which each gender has

⁽⁹⁾ Local executive bodies, coordinated by the regional delegations, with the social partners represented on the respective advisory boards. These vocational training centres are responsible for scheduling, preparing, implementing, supporting and evaluating initial or continuing vocational training initiatives and for ensuring that the vocational certification system functions at local level, thereby promoting human resources development and stimulating development in their regions.

⁽¹⁰⁾ This vocational training centre, part of the Lisboa e Vale do Tejo regional delegation, was formed through the reorganisation/merger of two centres in the same region. It is located in a area with a large concentration of enterprises, allowing it to offer a wide range of vocational training courses. It mainly serves the districts of Amadora, Cascais, Oeiras and Sintra.

⁽¹¹⁾ The questionnaires were used with the 21 cohorts between 28 April and 7 June 2004.

a significant majority appear to correspond to a sexist division of labour, bearing witness to the traditional effects of occupational gender stereotyping on young people's choices. Boys therefore prefer more industry and technology-based courses, where contact with the work environment is more masculine, while girls gravitate more towards services-related courses.

Table 2. Trainees according to gender and training course followed (%)

	Gender	
	Male	Female
Computer technician	89.6	10.4
Typesetter	56.8	43.2
Off-set printer	85.7	14.3
Graphic designer	75.0	25.0
Managerial support staff	46.7	53.3
Hotel receptionist	38.5	61.5
Clerk	0.0	100.0
Accountant and managerial staff	30.8	69.2
Building electrician	100.0	0.0
Refrigeration technician	100.0	0.0
Administrative staff	0.0	100.0
Total	68.8	31.2

Typesetting and managerial support enjoy a more balanced gender distribution, their broad training profile leading to a variety of occupational outcomes. They are often linked to the newer occupational areas, which may explain why they more easily avoid male and female stereotyping and the codification of what is traditionally expected of girls and boys.

Position in the social milieu

Since there is a close and dynamic relationship between the condition of the family of origin and the social condition of the young people themselves, the research sought to identify certain characteristics of the household that would help to explain the young people's educational pathways so far and those planned for the future.

The aim was therefore to understand the position of the young people in the social milieu of origin, using as indicators educational backgrounds (parents' level of education) and socio-professional

resources (parents' occupation and situation in that occupation, used to classify the trainees' households in the social classes of origin). These, as António Firmino da Costa states (1999, p. 224), are substantively connected to the central nature of the occupational area and the education system in structuring contemporary social relationships and the differential distribution of individual, family and group resources, powers, attributes and opportunities.

The analysis of levels of education of trainees' parents echoed the findings already outlined in other research: most of the young people come from family groups with very low levels of education, over half this population having failed to progress beyond the second cycle. The small percentage that reached secondary education (the current level of the young people surveyed) and higher education should also be noted.

Table 3. **Levels of education reached by the father and mother (%)**

	Father	Mother
Did not complete 1st cycle	11.1	10.8
Basic education – 1st cycle	33.7	31.2
Basic education – 2nd cycle	11.8	15.1
Basic education – 3rd cycle	18.3	22.6
Secondary education	10.4	11.8
Intermediate or higher education	8.2	5.7
Doesn't know/doesn't answer	6.5	2.9
Total	100.0	100.0

This analysis appears to underscore the notion that a large majority of these young people are seeking to be upwardly mobile in comparison with their parents. It should be pointed out, however, that intergenerational upward educational mobility does not necessarily mean intergenerational upward social mobility. Increasing school enrolment rates together with a devaluation of qualifications and an increase in the number of years of compulsory education, which obviously reproduces the relative positions, requires educational capital to be increased if the relative position in the social structure is to be preserved (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu and Passeron, s.d).

The next step was to analyse the household, taking account of the family socio-professional indicator ⁽¹²⁾ and the interdependen-

⁽¹²⁾ The guidelines set out by António Firmino da Costa (1999) were used to construct the family socio-professional indicator of the class locations of households.

cies established among themselves and with the various dimensions examined with a view to an approximate characterisation of trainees' social class origins.

Table 4. **Social class (family socio-professional indicator) (%)**

Entrepreneurs, executives and professional	13.6
Technical and managerial staff	9.3
Self-employed	5.0
Multi-activity self-employed	7.2
Multi-activity self-employed farmers	0.4
Unskilled workers	28.0
Manual workers	11.1
Agricultural workers	0.4
Multi-activity unskilled workers	22.2
Unclassified	2.9
Total	100.0

It can be seen from Table 4 that the social composition of this population, ascertained by means of this family socio-professional indicator, includes a considerable weight of multi-activity families involved in multiple socio-professional areas, with a greater incidence of multi-activity unskilled workers, which includes both unskilled and manual workers (22.2 %), or in other words, situations reflecting low qualification employment.

The multi-activity self-employed, corresponding to 7.2 % of families, include situations in which trade coexists with unskilled or manual workers.

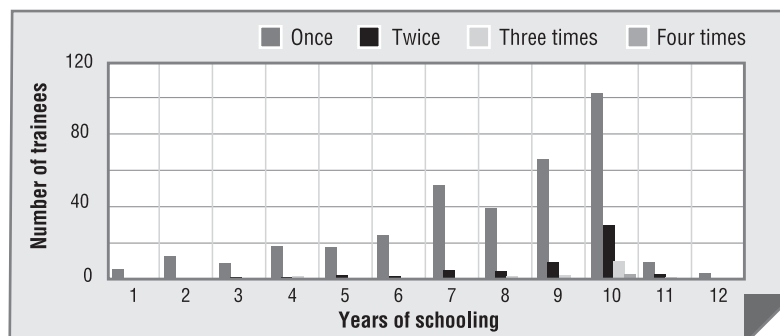
Over half the trainees' families are found in the low qualification and subordinate employment segment (unskilled and manual workers, agricultural workers and multi-activity unskilled workers) (61.7 %), supporting notions according to which children from lower social classes with less educational capital tend to opt for this type of training.

Educational pathway

To understand how the schooling processes of these trainees have developed, their educational pathways were analysed in the light of the impact that failure and interruptions and the reasons for them had on their perceptions of their educational and professional future.

Educational failure is a dominant occurrence for these trainees, 90.7 % of whom have already experienced the need to repeat a year at least once. It was also noted that although this arises throughout the educational pathway, failure is more prevalent and sometimes a recurring phenomenon from the end of the first cycle in particular.

Figure 1. **Number of repeats per year of education**



These results suggest that gaps in schooling appear from the first cycle of basic education, even though they are not reflected in very high failure rates at this level. These shortcomings become more marked in the second and third cycles, culminating in an extremely worrying situation in secondary education ⁽¹³⁾ (Azevedo, 2002).

Since they originate from family backgrounds with fewer resources and low educational capital, these young people do not appear to have a range of abilities allowing them to adapt easily to the knowledge school requires. While educational inheritance alone does not determine the development of social strategies during educational pathways, its influence on the probability of this being the case cannot be overlooked.

Together with educational failure, interruptions in studying were also used as another indicator to help to explain young people's difficulties in adapting to the requirements of school, and in school responding to the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous public.

The data show that over a quarter of those surveyed (27.2 %) decided to interrupt their studies at a particular moment, this being common both to boys (29.2 %) and girls (23 %).

The reasons given and the degree of importance attributed show

⁽¹³⁾ The low failure rates recorded in the 11th and 12th years are related to the small percentage of these trainees that reached these levels of schooling, confirmed by the recurrence of repetitions in the 10th year, which make this year a difficult stage to get through.

that they were influenced mostly by the fact that they had had a job opportunity, followed by lack of recognition of the usefulness of the apprenticeship and dislike of studying.

The influence of the education process on young people's reasons for deciding to start studying again must be interpreted as the result of the selective effect the educational institution has on its public. Young people actively construct and reconstruct their biographies and strive to influence their outcomes. This is the 'yo-yo' generation (Pais, 2001), which has experienced the most varied situations: some young people leave school prematurely in the expectation of beginning a professional career, but eventually go back because of the difficulty of finding work.

Trainee choices

It is also known that young people's educational choices, considered to be an integral part of a future project, arise out of a range of possibilities in which elements such as family, sociability and the school form a dynamic and specific framework (Mateus, 2002). In that light, this research sought to analyse the reasons underlying trainees' choices.

Table 5. **Reasons for opting for the apprenticeship system** ⁽¹⁴⁾ (%)

To learn a profession	36.2
An easier way to obtain the 12th year	38.0
To earn some money and do the 12th year at the same time	12.9
To get a job more easily	17.2
To undergo more practical training	19.4
Having failed several times in their educational career	2.5
Being advised to do so by the school careers guidance service	5.7
Being encouraged by parents	4.3
To be better prepared to enter higher education	6.8
To be better prepared to enter the world of work	54.5

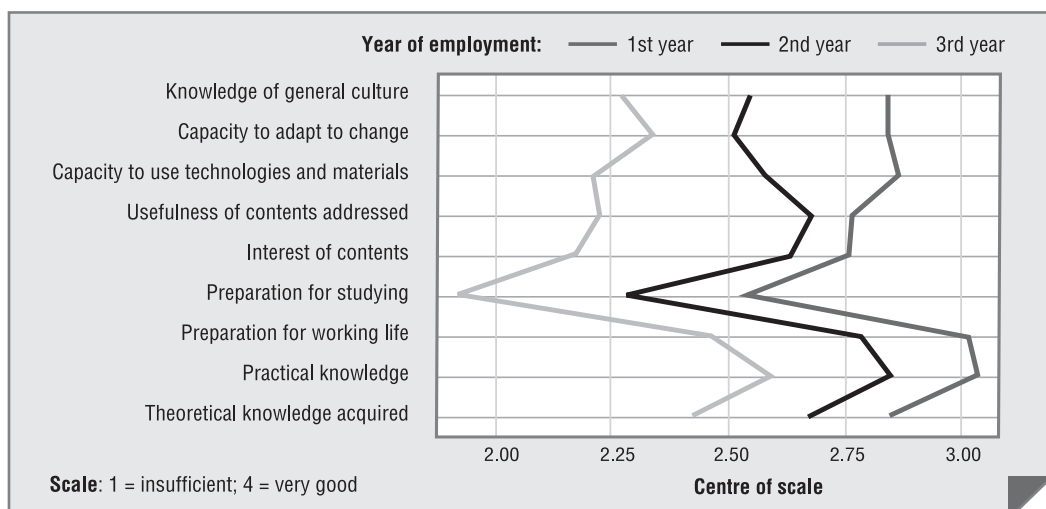
⁽¹⁴⁾ The questionnaire asked for two reasons.

Besides learning a profession (36.2 %), the trainees know that it is important to be well prepared to enter the world of work (54.5 %). This seems to bear witness to a broader awareness which is consistent with uncertain and changing times. An instrumental significance is therefore clearly connected to this choice and extends in particular to the link between school and working life – better preparation, an easier way to get a job and the learning of an occupation. This concern is also mirrored by an underlying need to obtain educational certification and equivalence: 38 % of those surveyed say that they chose this type of training because it was an easier way to obtain the 12th year, while 12.9 % say that they chose it to be able to earn some money and do the 12th year at the same time.

Opinion of the course followed

The trainees surveyed generally had a very positive opinion of the aspects selected to provide a generic description of this type of training, considering practical knowledge and preparation for working life to be the most positive, and preparation for studying to be the least positive. It was also noted that from the first to the third year, the evaluation made of all aspects deteriorated, the greatest difference in average results occurring in the capacity to use technologies and materials and preparation for studying.

Figure 2. Evaluation of training course (average)



These data seem to suggest that there is an inverse relationship between the evaluation of the training course and the year of enrolment, the most discontented and most critical trainees mainly being those in the third year, evidencing a certain fall in the expectations created when training began. There was significant despondency even in criteria that had led the trainees to choose this type of training, such as preparation for working life.

Trainees' perceptions and expectations for the future

Entry into the labour market and the prolongation of schooling intersect in these young people's future plans. Although most intend to get a job within their area of training, a very substantial number would like to enter higher education, even if this means combining education with a job.

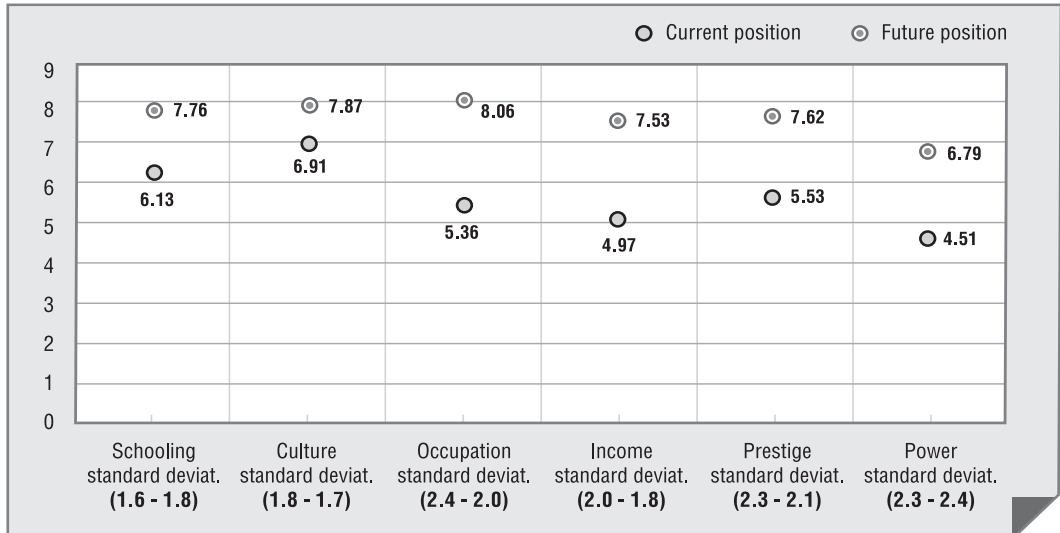
Table 6. **Educational and professional plans (%)**

To enter higher education as full-time students	5.7
To enter higher education and work at the same time	26.2
To get a job in their area of training	55.2
To get a job in a different area	5.7
To do other training in a different area	4.7

Another aspect relevant to the analysis of these young people's perceptions was to see how level III apprenticeship trainees are represented in certain symbolic dimensions of social standing. The model presented by Mauritti (2003) in a study carried out with young university students was followed to this end.

The young people surveyed were also asked to evaluate themselves according to two equal blocks of indicators (dimensions of stratification involving education, culture, occupation, income, prestige and power), one relating to social positions they feel they have in the current context and the other to the future (20 years hence). Hierarchical scales of social importance were used in which 1 corresponds to the lowest point and 10 to the highest. The average positions for each indicator were then calculated.

Figure 3. Representations of social position (average)



The average values represented in the diagram show that in relation to current positions, there is a differentiation between the various dimensions, with culture and education playing a crucial role in how these trainees see themselves in the social environment. Their expectations in relation to their situation 20 years hence are higher than their current expectations, though they maintain the same profile, in which occupation, culture and education are in evidence.

As regards *occupation*, the dimension in this study in which the young people have greater expectations of improving their position, the instrumental effectiveness this type of training reflects in their professional expectations seems to be confirmed. Whether by means of the equivalence of educational attainment provided by studying, or the vocational qualifications acquired by means of the training and which provide them with a more highly qualified position in the world of work, what is certain is that these young people envisage a very high-level professional future for themselves 20 years hence.

According to the positions as a whole, it can be concluded that educational and cultural resources (dimensions in which average positions are high) seem to lead to professional opportunities which in turn bring the other dimensions with them: income, prestige and power.

Approaches and expectations of the enterprises

Dimension, branch of activity and markets

In terms of *dimension*, the vast majority of the enterprises covered by this study (91 %) are small and medium-sized (SMEs) ⁽¹⁵⁾, most of which (71.2 %) employ fewer than 50 people. This is typical of the Portuguese business fabric: mainly SMEs with simple organisational structures which are generally run by the majority shareholder, who has a low level of education (Rodrigues, 1998).

Among the enterprises studied, only 16.1 % are ISO quality certified, virtually all of these being medium-sized or large.

It is therefore legitimate to ask whether structures appropriate to this type of training exist at enterprise level. The need to adapt the training model to the Portuguese business fabric could undermine certain principles underlying this training, particularly as regards developing the pedagogical value of on-the-job training. As stated in the CIDECE Report (1994), enterprises with endogenous resources envisaged in the spirit of the model are very limited in Portuguese business, which means that the apprenticeship system would not have been able to grow numerically if these smaller enterprises which are less well equipped for training and which have less capacity to provide it in-house were not gradually involved. This process is expressed in the number of apprentices per enterprise ⁽¹⁶⁾, which tends to marginalise training in companies.

Reasons for involvement in the apprenticeship system

Enterprises justify their involvement as a way of complying with what they consider to be their social responsibility, and also acknowledge that it is a more effective form of recruitment. Another important or very important factor is that it enables the policy of upgrading personnel to be implemented, though there are significant variations according to the size of enterprise.

As to how they are kept up to date with the operation of training, 71.4 % attribute this to the tutor, while only 57.1 % attribute it to regular contact with the vocational training centre. It should be noted that 5.4 % of those surveyed claim that they are not kept informed,

⁽¹⁵⁾ The definition of SME laid down in the Commission Recommendation of 3 April 1996 (OJ L 107 of 30.04.1996, p.4) was taken as a reference point. This defines the criteria for its classification: number of persons employed, annual turnover and independence. In this study only the criterion of the number of persons employed has been considered.

⁽¹⁶⁾ In this study the average number of trainees per enterprise is 2.1.

attributing this exclusively to the tutor. This also becomes apparent when respondents are asked how involvement in training is manifested. Monitoring what trainees do in the enterprise, planning with the tutor and evaluation are considered to be more important. Less importance is attached to contact with the vocational training centre. This seems to suggest that a substantial proportion of enterprises operate on a largely autonomous basis, focusing the objectives on their own needs and neglecting the coordination necessary for the process to operate.

Evaluation of the training provision

The representatives of the enterprises agree that the training provided is appropriate to labour market and enterprise needs and is adaptable to changes in employment and occupations. The smaller enterprises, however, are less optimistic, associating this training provision more with disadvantaged workers, and also considering it to be well designed in theory but exhibiting shortcomings in practice.

When asked what they consider to be the most positive aspect, the respondents unreservedly cite on-the-job training (80.4 %). This component is generally seen as a cornerstone of the success of the apprenticeship system, and is recognised as the crucial indicator of quality by means of which its external effectiveness is guaranteed.

Lack of coordination between the two components is also clearly in evidence. Although they acknowledge that the enterprises are not able to visit the vocational training centre to monitor the training process, some suggest that the centre should set up a monitoring committee for trainees in the enterprise.

A significant number of respondents in fact acknowledge that they are unable to express an overall opinion of the training process because they are unaware of many of the goals and activities associated to the training delivered in the training centre. This indicator, which is additional to those already mentioned, highlights a certain fragmentation of the training team. Besides its possible consequences for the teaching work, this reflects a worrying lack of coordination between training components if the link between them is seen as a desirable characteristic of this combined model. It is a sign of weak involvement in the system, which actually calls the principal goals and potential of on-the-job training into question.

It was noted that the representatives of enterprises pointed to lack of job market stability as an obstacle to job-seeking. Once again there was an awareness of the still little-monitored impact of a first job

market in which activities predominate over jobs (Azevedo, 1998). In the light of this uncertain and unstable scenario, Pais (2001) even questions the role of vocational training, arguing that it has not helped to eliminate or dilute some of the more negative aspects of the employment system, particularly the fact that it does not adequately respond to the problem of youth unemployment.

This becomes even more pertinent when it is noted that lack of appropriate educational preparation for performing an occupation and lack of experience are other obstacles indicated by the representatives of enterprises. On the one hand, the idea prevails that advanced vocational training is required that allows young people to rapidly master a complex job, while on the other it is acknowledged that despite its combined approach, this training may appear less attractive, clearly showing that work experience may predominate over the competitive advantages arising out of such training.

Interestingly enough, little over half the enterprises surveyed admit that they opt for a trainee of this type of training if they need to engage a new employee.

Table 7. Choice of a new employee (%)

A young recent level III graduate of the IEFP apprenticeship system	53.6
A young person with the 12th year of secondary education	1.8
A young recent graduate	8.9
A worker with proven experience	35.7

Although some positive views arise throughout the survey on the effects of training in the organisational and production framework of enterprises, 35.7 % would nevertheless recruit a worker with proven experience, despite the positive aspects of training.

In our opinion this is related to the fact that enterprises seek urgent answers for multifaceted problems. Short-term results therefore prevail over medium to long-term investment, which would require a willingness to create or to develop apprenticeship systems. These are the reasons given for the choices made by the respondents, who highlight work experience as a means of achieving operational outcomes in a short time span.

Enterprises that would opt for a young person who has recently completed the level III apprenticeship scheme justify their choice by citing the possibility of training a worker according to the enterprise's philosophy, and the fact that they are familiar with the young person's characteristics and potential. Once again the focus is on work

socialisation rather than on the positive aspects of the various training components. Since the period of adaptation to the enterprise is minimised and enterprises have the opportunity to test the young person's skills, recruitment is significantly less risky.

The high value placed on work experience, lack of knowledge of curricula and syllabuses and lack of faith in the training delivered in the training centre are also in evidence in respondents' answers.

Perceptions and expectations of trainees

The representatives of the enterprises understand that the young people opted for this type of training mainly because of the need to obtain educational equivalence to the 12th year and because of the importance of preparation for the world of work.

Table 8. **Expectations as regards trainees' educational and professional plans (%)**

To enter higher education as full-time students	0.0
To enter higher education and work at the same time	12.5
To get a job in their area of training	75.0
To get a job in a different area of training	8.9
To do other training in a different area	0.0
To join the ranks of the youth unemployed	3.6

Those surveyed believe that the trainees opted for this type of training to learn an occupation and to be better prepared for the world of work, their short/medium-term plan being to get a job within their area of training. The convergence of expectations among those surveyed to some extent demonstrates the role of this type of training as a virtual promoter of an alignment of trainee outcomes: to conclude level III training and begin a professional career. It should be noted that none of the respondents expect these young people to enter full-time higher education, and only 12.5 % expect them to do so if it is combined with having a job.

Those surveyed generally agree that the young people have the basic skills required to enter the labour market and meet the requirements of enterprises, but they are less optimistic about their chances of promising professional careers. It is the larger enterprises which are more dissatisfied, having a less positive view of trainees' attributes.

Conclusion

This type of training represents an opportunity for the education system, which faces high levels of failure and persistently high numbers of premature school leavers. Young people's willingness to prolong their schooling is a good indicator of the capacity of this training provision to attract many young people into education, thus providing scope for future plans and expectations to be (re)defined. This willingness may also be seen as a major challenge, since it suggests that the traditional incompatibility between vocational and academic courses should be viewed in a different light.

For the employment system too, which suffers from increasing youth unemployment and a lack of qualified and highly qualified intermediate personnel (Azevedo, 2003), apprenticeship can also be seen as an opportunity, since it is a training system that combines theory with practice.

Although observations and opinions favourable to a combined approach have been evident throughout this research, on-the-job training is underexploited, pointing towards a combination of employment and education ⁽¹⁷⁾ and the promotion of activities more characteristic of Taylorism.

These considerations become even more understandable when the findings of studies cited by Clara Correia (1999) are taken into account. These highlight the inconsistent arguments voiced by Portuguese entrepreneurs: on the one hand, they call for human resources qualifications in a climate of innovation and competitiveness; on the other, they continue to recruit people with lower levels of education, claiming that they do not know what training exists, or what its principal advantages are. Luís Imaginário (1999, 2000) also draws attention to the fact that the public and private sector labour market continues to recruit workers at the lowest cost, even if this means young people whose educational attainment is rudimentary and who are professionally under-qualified, disregarding the intermediate level qualifications awarded by the training system. Guerreiro and Abrantes (2004) likewise argue that Portuguese business is resistant to organisational change, and therefore to employing better qualified workers. The business class in general, with few qualifi-

⁽¹⁷⁾ According to Imaginário (1999, p. 26-27), this training 'typology' is limited to ensuring the coexistence of two different periods of activities, one in a training context and the other in a work context, but with no link between them. The learning environments and periods are independent of each other and take no account of trainee learning strategies in a perspective likely to favour the absorption of what has been learned.

cations, has relied on technological innovation and cost-cutting above all, and has resisted organisational change and training. In parallel and as a consequence, a different scenario is evident that separates us from other European countries (Grácio, 2000; Pais, 2001; Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004): the fact that unemployment in Portugal affects young people with intermediate qualifications in particular.

This situation ultimately has a significant impact on the labour market's capacity to attract young people. The increasing demand for people with intermediate qualifications will therefore be a consequence of the development of a whole range of functions and of the appearance of new types of business organisation in Portugal (Azevedo, 2003).

Besides all the situations highlighted, this issue also concerns the socio-professional capital conferred by these courses, Guerreiro and Abrantes pointing out that its development has generated new problems and challenges, and it is now acknowledged that its complete success – in its dual role of meeting young people's expectations and work organisations' needs – also depends on closer cooperation with employers' organisations and secondary and higher education institutions. (2004: 67)

Having highlighted some of the general outlines of this study, certain core questions must be raised which may be relevant to the future of these young people: Will they find a job in their area of training? Will they get into the labour market at a professional level corresponding to their skills? Will they enter higher education? Will they be able to transfer what they have learned to new contexts?

Other questions relating more to education policy also arise out of these conclusions. If apprenticeship represents an opportunity for the Portuguese education system, how will it be able to overcome the limitations referred to and, on its own, find out how to achieve its aims, gradually becoming part of the social dimension of the new Community values?

Much more than an exhaustive list, the general considerations and questions set out here seek to systematise some of the inferences that have arisen throughout this research. Far from exhausting this issue, we would like these considerations and questions to raise further questions and issues in an ongoing debate.

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